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Former Michigan State University President John Hannah insists MSU's role in training police for the South Vietnamese government was not improper, but a man who once advised the ''Vietnam Project'' suggests it would not be repeated.

Debate over MSU's involvement in the Vietnam War was rekindled here by the recent public television documentary on the conflict.

Hannah told the Lansing State Journal MSU was pulled into its role of assisting South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diehm.

''We were asked to do something for the government of the United States and we did it,'' he said.

Asked if MSU's role was improper, he said ''Not at all.''

Ralph Smuckler, dean of international studies at MSU and chief adviser to the Vietnam Project for two years, said the involvement of Central Intelligence Agency personnel was a matter of public record and they were not working under cover.

Smuckler said MSU played a positive role in what was considered to be a very repressive regime. ''For a period of five or six years while we were there, there was real momentum, while in the countryside, repression was building up,'' he said.

Smuckler said it was not wrong to train Diehm's police. But he added the university would not likely do the same again under the same or similar circumstances and said he was not proud of MSU's involvement.

Michigan State has a world reknown criminal justice program.